

ASSET SURVEY

EXPERIMENT IN RURAL COOPERATION

A UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA SUSTAINABLE
DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP IN SOUTHEAST
MINNESOTA

Project Director

Lacey Hartman, Community Assistantship Program

Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs, M.P.P. candidate

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Forward

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Although the asset survey was developed in close collaboration with the Experiment in Rural Cooperation's board of directors and other key stakeholders, the following narrative reflects the interpretations of the author, Lacey Hartman.

For additional copies, contact

Dick Broeker

RR 3, Box 1861

Lake City, MN 55041

(651) 345-7551

dbroeker@rconnect.com

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SECTION ONE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Experiment in Rural Cooperation is a regional agricultural and natural resources sustainable development partnership funded by the Minnesota Legislature and administered by the University of Minnesota. Four similar partnerships exist elsewhere in Minnesota. The Experiment in Rural Cooperation is a citizen tool to broaden and deepen the land-grant mission of the University of Minnesota. The Experiment promotes University-based research, outreach and education in southeast Minnesota. The region includes the counties of Olmsted, Fillmore, Houston, Goodhue, Winona, and Wabasha and small portions of Mower and Dodge counties.

The Experiment in Rural Cooperation supports local projects and businesses in agriculture and natural resources, including farming, tourism and forestry. The goal is to foster a homegrown economy that will support self-reliant communities and a healthy natural environment in southeast Minnesota. Over the last four years, the Experiment has provided funding for a wide range of projects including a sustainable financing initiative to develop investment capital for local ventures; a locally owned and operated food limited liability corporation; and the development of wind energy resources in the region. A complete list of the Experiment's 43 projects follows this summary.

The Experiment's 18-member board of directors represents a broad cross-section of southeast Minnesota citizen leaders as well as five University of Minnesota representatives. The board believes that common-sense research and problem solving, using the vast array of resources available through the University of Minnesota, opens up possibilities for a strong and sustainable future in southeast Minnesota.

In March of 1999, the board of directors completed a region-wide asset survey. The information gained through this survey was essential to developing the Experiment's course of action over the next few years. As a result, hundreds of southeast Minnesota citizens and University of Minnesota students and faculty have participated in 43 projects.

The value of the 1999 survey to the Experiment was part of the inspiration for this second round of asset mapping. More important, however, was the sense among the board members that the challenges to sustainable approaches to enhancing regional vitality had become even more complex and difficult in the last few years. The goal of the 2002 asset survey was to identify what issues are key to a sustainable future for southeast Minnesota, and to reevaluate what role the Experiment can play in securing such a future.

DATA HIGHLIGHTS

The most common occupations or primary public roles among the respondents are local government (35.9%) and farming (22.5%).

The vast majority (76.3%) of the respondents have lived in southeast Minnesota for more than 20 years.

When asked to select among a list of issues those most important to the future of southeast Minnesota, there was most consensus around agriculture (79.8%), rural/small town life (70.7%), and economic development (61.6%).

37.8% of the respondents think that the quality of life in southeast Minnesota will stay about the same, 25.3% think it will deteriorate, and 23.2% think it will improve.

When asked to list the three most troubling issues facing the future of southeast Minnesota, the most frequently cited concerns were economic issues (50.4%); land use, growth, and planning (46.2%); agriculture (38.9%); and the environment and natural resources (35.4%).

When asked to list southeast Minnesota's three most important assets or strengths, 44.3% said that the people of southeast Minnesota are its most important asset. 41.6% cite the region's natural resources as important, and 41.7% mention that southeast Minnesota's natural beauty is an important strength.

40.3% of the respondents are most involved in an organization that is growing in vitality. 45.7% say that the organization in which they are most involved has remained about the same over the years; only 14.0% say that their organization is shrinking in vitality.

52.3% of the respondents think that the University of Minnesota can make a positive contribution to the future of southeast Minnesota through regional education programs. 24.8% cite the support of projects and small businesses as an important contribution, and 18.1% mention that the University of Minnesota could contribute to the future of southeast Minnesota through research.

45.1% of the respondents are very familiar with the concept of sustainable development. 43.4% are somewhat familiar with the term, and 11.5% are not at all familiar with sustainable development.

47.2% of the respondents think that sustainable development is a good concept. 22.3% think it is a good concept but clouded with negative overtones, 12.4% find it confusing, 7.7% support sustainable development but are uncomfortable with the term, 6.4% have no reaction to the term, and 1.7% reject the concept of sustainable development.

Demographics

The surveys were sent to a representative group of citizen leaders, elected officials, civic and community groups, agricultural and conservation organizations, governmental agencies, churches and others in southeast Minnesota. Of the 430 surveys that were mailed to eligible participants in mid-October, 242 were returned by December 11, 2002, yielding a response rate of 56%. Six additional surveys were returned after December 11, which brings the response rate up to 58%. This is a good response for a four-page, mail-in survey with several open ended questions. It is also important to note that the asset survey conducted in 1999 had a similarly high response rate of 59%. The respondents to the 2002 survey fall into a broad range of occupational categories, but are most commonly involved in local (primarily township) government (35.9%) and/or as farmers (22.5%). Other occupations include work in the non-profit sector, education, and the publications field. The vast majority (76.3%) of the respondents have lived in southeast Minnesota for more than 20 years. The organizations that the respondents are involved in work on a wide variety of issues, but the most commonly cited are those that also shape the Experiment's work: land use, agriculture, the environment, and public policy. The counties represented by those organizations are pretty evenly distributed across the region, with less representation from Mower and Dodge counties. The most important sources of information for the organizations represented in the survey are meetings (66.5%) and government agencies (63.3%). Generally, the organizations that respondents are involved in have sufficient information (84.3%) and are growing in or maintaining vitality (86.0%). However, scarce resources are a concern for about 48% of the organizations. Not surprisingly, when asked with which things organizations needed the most assistance, the most common response (60.8%) was funding.

Issues facing the future of southeast Minnesota

The respondents are generally optimistic about the future of southeast Minnesota, with 61% expecting that the quality of life will improve or stay about the same. Perhaps more importantly, when asked about the region's most important assets or strengths, the most common response was that the people of southeast Minnesota—and their work ethic and friendliness—are the region's most important strength. There is clearly consensus that the capacity to meet challenges thoughtfully and creatively exists within the region. However, there is also broad concern about how some key issues will impact the potential for a positive future in southeast Minnesota. The most commonly cited concerns include economic problems, changes in agriculture, issues surrounding land use and planning, and environmental deterioration.

50.4% of the respondents cite economic issues as one of the important problems facing the future of southeast Minnesota. The key concerns here are lack of livable wage jobs in the region and the loss of small town businesses. 41% of the respondents indicate that insufficient availability of investment capital is an issue of high importance.

Closely linked to concerns about the economic future of the region are concerns about agriculture. 38.9% of the respondents mention issues surrounding agriculture as key to the future of southeast Minnesota. Most of these comments center around concerns about the loss of small farms, the increasing influence of corporate agriculture in the region, and the combined effects of these changes on rural economic vitality. 69.5% of the respondents state that the weakening agricultural economy is an issue of high importance.

Issues surrounding land use, growth, and planning also figure prominently in the respondents' comments about key concerns for the future of southeast Minnesota. 46.2% of the respondents cite these issues as important to the future of southeast Minnesota. The overwhelming area of concern is that growth and development are occurring haphazardly and without a clear vision for the future. Many respondents specifically cite urban sprawl as a pressing problem. The comments indicate general frustration with the lack of systematic, community-wide discussions about the best path for growth in the region.

Protection of southeast Minnesota's diverse and beautiful environment is an important issue for many of the respondents. 42% state that the environment and natural resources are among the region's most important strengths. An equal number cite the area's natural beauty as a key asset. 35.4% of the respondents state that the deterioration of the environment is one of the three most troubling issues facing the future of southeast Minnesota. Specific areas of concern include water quality, soil erosion, and pollution.

Although not commonly stated, responses about community values and leadership in southeast Minnesota provide interesting insight into the potential to address important issues. 15.4% of the respondents mention tensions around the development of community as one of the most important problems facing the region's future. These comments are generally characterized by a concern that the people of southeast Minnesota are not communicating effectively about important issues, i.e. that there is lack of a "common vision". More specifically, respondents are concerned that tensions caused by changing population trends are blocking important conversations about the future of the region. These comments generally reflect a fear that differing perspectives among "old timers" in the region and newcomers distracts attention from issues that are important to all residents. This is perhaps connected to the broad concerns about unplanned growth and development.

The surveys also portray some consensus about what issues are not considered important to the future of southeast Minnesota. 52.6% of the respondents say that racial and ethnic tensions are of low or no importance. 49.8% indicate that housing for migrant workers is an issue of low or no importance. 42.2% of respondents state that limited access to healthcare is an issue of low or no importance.

Sustainable Development

The extent to which people understand the concept of sustainable development, and how they respond to the concept, are extremely important issues for the Experiment in Rural

Cooperation. The survey responses indicate that the majority of people have heard about sustainable development and that they support the concept, although some don't like the term. 45.1% of the respondents are very familiar with the term sustainable development. This is a change from the 1999 survey, when 34.2% of the respondents indicated that they were very familiar with the term. 43.4% are somewhat familiar with the term in 2002, which is very similar to the 41.7% in 1999. Only 11.1% are not at all familiar with the term in 2002, which is a substantial decrease from 24.1% in 1999. There is also broader support for the concept, with 47.2% citing it as a "good concept" in 2002 as compared to 39.9% in 1999. As was the case in 1999, less than 2% of the respondents to the 2002 survey reject the concept of sustainable development.

Recommendations for the Experiment in Rural Cooperation

Respondents were asked to select the two most important contributions that the Experiment in Rural Cooperation could make to shaping a positive future in southeast Minnesota. There is the most support for the Experiment to sponsor alternative projects in agriculture and natural resources (52.2%) and to support small businesses and food ventures (55.2%). These descriptions broadly characterize the work that the Experiment has been doing for the last few years, largely as a result of the support for such projects that was indicated by the 1999 asset survey. There is much less support for the Experiment to undertake large projects (15.1%) or to develop new projects or programs (10.8%). This breakdown of support for different types of work is quite similar to the results of the 1999 survey.

Recommendations for the University of Minnesota

When asked how the University of Minnesota can make a contribution to the future of southeast Minnesota, respondents indicate the broadest support (52.3%) for regional education programs. The University of Minnesota Extension Service, in particular, is cited as valuable to community education and development. Smaller numbers of respondents state that the University could contribute to the future of southeast Minnesota through project and small business support (24.8%), research (18.1%), and facilitation (16.1%). When asked about instances where the University of Minnesota has been of value, only 52.1% of the respondents answered the question. Again, regional education programs are the most commonly cited (51.6%). 34.1% of the respondents say that previous support of projects and small businesses had been valuable. 23.8% cite research as a valuable contribution. It is difficult to say what the low response rates for both of these questions (only 61.6% of the respondents answered the question about how the University of Minnesota can contribute to the future of the region) indicate about the perception of the University in southeast Minnesota. However, it is important to note that the questions about the University of Minnesota were open ended and near the end of the survey, which may have contributed to the low response rates.

Overall Comparison to 1999 results

The results of the 2002 survey as compared to the 1999 asset survey do not indicate any substantial shifts in opinion about the future of southeast Minnesota. The same issues that were cited as important to the region's future in 1999-the economy, agriculture, land use, and the environment-continue to be areas of concern in 2002. There seems to be greater consensus in 2002 that land use and the economy are among the most pressing concerns for the future of southeast Minnesota. As has already been noted, there are clearly more people familiar with the concept of sustainable development in 2002 than there were in 1999.

Conclusion

The 2002 asset survey responses indicate that the Experiment in Rural Cooperation's focus on agriculture, the environment, and land use resonate with what people perceive as the key issues facing the future of southeast Minnesota. There seems to be continued support for the kind of work that the Experiment has been doing to date. The respondents express heightened concern about the effects of unplanned growth and development. Implicit in these comments is a need for a more systematic and open approach to articulating a framework for future growth in southeast Minnesota.

Overall, it is difficult to characterize the manner in which the citizens of southeast Minnesota (as they are represented in this study) view the University of Minnesota. On the one hand, the survey responses indicate broad appreciation for the specific projects that organizations like the Experiment in Rural Cooperation and the University of Minnesota Extension Service bring to the region. However, there seems to be a disconnect between what citizens see as situations in which the University is doing important work, and the perception of the University of Minnesota as an institution actively engaged in improving the lives of citizens. Whether that disconnect is due to real or perceived shortcomings in the University's outreach and education efforts, and the extent to which such a disconnect really exists, cannot be clearly established from the results of this study. It does provide important context, though, for the discussion about how a more open and thoughtful conversation about growth and development in southeast Minnesota could be best facilitated.

**Experiment in Rural Cooperation
University of Minnesota Southeast Regional Partnership
Project Master List (January, 2003)**

(note: amount in parentheses represents Experiment in Rural Cooperation's actual financial support and does not include total project budget, nor in-kind contributions)

1. Agronomy Class Rural Experience – complete (2002): a dozen U. of M. agronomy students/faculty spending two days in southeast Minnesota with Experiment in Rural Cooperation board leaders and agricultural/natural resources project leaders.
2. Alternative Swine Production Roundtables – ongoing (2002-03, \$7,500): Area hog farms working together with University of Minnesota faculty on swine housing alternatives and practice improvements based on on-farm experience.
3. Animal Processing Study - complete (2000-01): Experiment in Rural Cooperation task force with U. of M. and community livestock agricultural interests to examine regional animal processing capacity to support area livestock farmers.
4. Apple Blossom Drive – complete (2000-02, \$9,500): U. of M. Center for Urban & Regional Affairs working with local government on development issues and options in scenic area within prime agricultural acreage in Winona County.
5. Apple Crisp Cooperative – ongoing (1999-03,\$10,000/\$23,000): Two-phase initiative to develop value-added apple products with support from U.'s Carlson School of Management and Department of Food, Science and Nutrition/COAFES.
6. Asset Issues Mapping II – ongoing (2002-03, \$12,500): Regional issues/assets mapping survey, undertaken by graduate student from the U.'s Humphrey Institute for Public Policy, as a way to focus priorities for the Experiment in Rural Cooperation's Board of Directors.
7. Badgersett Research Farm – ongoing (1999-2006, \$55,000/\$34,000): Two-phase initiative to commercialize hazel nut production as a sustainable woody agriculture crop alternative; support from U.'s College of Agricultural, Food & Environmental Sciences and CINRAM.
8. Birds and Grazing Practices - ongoing (2002-03, \$17,000/\$17,000): U. of M. graduate student working with 6 area farmers on grazing practices and their effect on wild bird populations in southeast Minnesota.
9. Building Local Tourism Marketing Capacity - ongoing (2002-2003, \$22,000): U. of M. Tourism Center all-day local tourism development seminar and consultation/support for 7 area tourism initiatives to build local capacity to undertake tourism marketing research.

10. Centro Campesino Migrant Housing – complete (2002, \$2,500): U. of M. Center for Urban and Regional Affairs with Community Assistantship Program student researching regional migrant housing needs.
11. Community Energy Self-Reliance - ongoing (1998-2004, \$15,000): Local community group working on municipal wind energy model, possibly using hydrogen fuel technology, with background support from the U. of M. Institute of Technology and others.
12. Country Heritage Adventures – complete (1998-2000, \$9,000): Group of agri-tourism interests working on marketing opportunities/strategies and supported by Carlson School of Management students.
13. Directory of Farms & Businesses – complete (2000, \$2,500): U. of M. Community Assistantship Program student initiative to compile listing of farms and business supporting southeast Minnesota's local economy.
14. Down Lighting – complete (1999-2002, \$12,500): Community-leader directed effort to encourage use of down lighting technology to conserve energy and protect the night time sky as a natural resource, and also providing consultation to U. of M. Facilities Services.
15. Education for Sustainable Communities – ongoing (2002-2003, \$20,000): Introducing sustainability-based curriculum materials into area junior high and high schools through efforts of U. of M. Extension Service, College of Education, and U. of M. CAP student.
16. Farm Story Project – ongoing (2002-2004, \$58,900/\$50,000/\$35,000): Experiment-funded initiative to tell the complete farm story in southeast Minnesota as a way to define future opportunities, including past/current contributions from U. of M. collaborations.
17. Farms to Schools Local Food Connections – ongoing (2001-2003, \$17,500): Local food initiative leaders developing new marketing opportunities for producers with schools and other institutional buyers, supported by U. of M. student and Department of Epidemiology.
18. Featherstone Fruits & Vegetables – complete (1999-2000, \$6,000): Design of inexpensive, portable grow-houses model to extend growing season and increase vegetable diversity options, with advice/support from U. of M. COAFES faculty.
19. Financing Sustainable Agriculture – ongoing (2002, \$2,500): Land Stewardship Project research study undertaken by U. of M. Community Assistantship Program student examining financial resources for sustainable farmers.

20. Finding Food in Farm Country – complete (1999-2000, \$10,000): U. of M. supported research assessing financial flow associated with food production and purchasing in Southeast Minnesota and its effect on the regional economy.
21. Food & Community in Southeast Minnesota – complete (2001, \$4,000): Overview paper to provide context for emerging local food network undertaken by holder of U.'s Endowed Chair for Agricultural Systems (College of Agricultural, Food & Environmental Sciences).
22. Food Business Development & Financing – complete (2001): Short term finance and business development training offered through Carlson School of Management adjunct faculty member.
23. Foods Working Group – complete (1999-2001, \$7,500): Twelve Experiment in Rural Cooperation food-related projects working in conjunction with a variety of U. of M. resources to foster development and launching of local food system.
24. Forest Landscape Management – ongoing (2001-2003, \$30,000): Region-wide forest landscape visioning project in cooperation with Minnesota Forest Resources Council, supported by U. of M. student, to be used to guide potential project funding.
25. Fresh Food Supply Chain Model – complete (2001, \$18,400): Hiawatha's Pantry/Full Circle Cooperative venture to mount a supply chain system model, supported through a variety of U. of M. resources.
26. Full Circle Cooperative Greenhouse – complete (1999-2001, \$10,200): Model development of energy efficient greenhouse to extend growing season for vegetable production, with consultation from U. Department of Horticultural Science.
27. Networking for the Future – complete (2001-2002, \$1,500): Community Assistantship Program student working with Blandin Foundation to assess communication technology options for inter-connecting rural communities.
28. Omega Cooperative Local Food Project – complete (1999-2001, \$12,200): Development of in-region producers cooperative as defined by consumer-based research to determine consumer-based marketing trends.
29. Paradise Prairie Products – ongoing (2000-2003, \$25,000): Development of a community-based food business with support of Carlson School of Management student and other U. of M. resources including 'By Design.'
30. Portfolio of Experiment in Rural Cooperation Initiatives – complete (2000, \$7,500): Publication and distribution of portfolio of Experiment-funded projects completed by Carlson School of Management student.

31. Renewing the Countryside – complete (2001, \$2,000): Financial and editorial assistance on publication of book featuring rural success stories, including several from southeast Minnesota, in support of U. of M. Northeast Regional Partnership.
32. Resources Asset Mapping Survey – complete (1999, \$10,000): Initial region-wide issues survey research to set agenda for Experiment in Rural Cooperation, undertaken by U. of M. Community Assistantship Program student in cooperation with Minnesota DNR.
33. Root River Cooperative Market – complete (1999-2001, \$7,000): Community-based local food system project to open new cooperative grocery store in Houston, MINNESOTA, a rural community that had lost all of its grocery stores owned by outside interests.
34. Selective Review of Documents – complete (1999, \$2,500): U. of M. student researcher review of pertinent documents and research reports containing information useful to the Experiment in Rural Cooperation's agenda.
35. Sirolli Project – complete (2001, \$5,700): Region-wide economic development training, working in cooperation with U. of M. Extension Service and the Initiative Fund of South Central and Southeast Minnesota.
36. Social Capital and Communication – complete (2000): Dutch researcher, in cooperation with U. of M. Department of Applied Economics, gathering information on communication issues associated local food system emerging activities in southeast Minnesota.
37. Southeast Minnesota Food Choices – complete (1999-2001, \$25,000): Land Stewardship Project initiative to design a major element of a local food system featuring sustainably-raised food products, supported by a variety of U. of M. resources.
38. Southeast Minnesota Food Network – ongoing (2000-2004, \$39,500/\$35,000/\$25,000): Start-up effort to launch – as the centerpiece of a local food system - a limited liability corporation comprised of area producers, supported by a variety of U. of M. resources.
39. Southeast Minnesota Sustainable Agriculture Consumer Survey - complete (2002, \$14,900): Extensive consumer research funded through the Experiment in Rural Cooperation's Southeast Minnesota Foods Working Group.
40. Sustainable Financing for Rural Minnesota – ongoing (1999- ?, \$62,700): Accessing new sources of capital equity and financing to support local enterprises, with support from Humphrey Institute for Public Affairs and Minnesota Institute for Sustainable Agriculture.

41. Value-added & Supply Chain Analysis– complete (2000-2001, \$9,500): Supply chain analysis conducted by Department of Applied Economics graduate student working with a select group of southeast Minnesota food producers.
42. Waste Wood Fuel – complete (1999-2001, \$24,150): Community-based Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and U. of M. College of Natural Resources research project focusing on recycling opportunities for region's waste wood supply.
43. Winona Farm Project – ongoing (2001-2003, \$10,000): On-farm model development of waste wood burner to cook recycled institutional food for animal feed, using a graduate student from U. of M. Institute of Technology to undertake preliminary feasibility research.

SECTION TWO

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

Methodology

The Experiment in Rural Cooperation sent out surveys to a representative group of citizen leaders, elected officials, civic and community groups, agricultural and conservation organizations, governmental agencies, churches and others in southeast Minnesota. Many of the people that were sent the 2002 survey had responded to the 1999 asset survey. The Experiment's board of directors also added individuals and groups that had since been identified as having an active interest in agriculture, natural resources, and other issues important to the future of southeast Minnesota. An introductory letter, brochure, and project list were mailed on October 14, 2002. On October 18, 2002, a letter and the four-page survey were mailed. Subsequent mailings included the following: a reminder postcard sent on October 25, 2002, followed by a re-mailing of the survey on November 12, 2002. A final reminder postcard was sent on November 20, 2002. Copies of these materials can be found in Appendix F.

Of the 430 surveys that were mailed out to eligible respondents in mid-October, 242 were returned by December 11, 2002, yielding a response rate of 56%. Six additional surveys were returned after December 11, which brings the response rate up to 58%. This is a good response for a four-page, mail-in survey that included several open-ended questions. It is also important to note that the asset mapping survey conducted in 1999 resulted in a similarly high response rate of 59%.

Data Tables

Frequency refers to the number of individuals that responded in a particular category. Respondents did not always answer every question. The percentages are based on the total number of individuals that responded to each question, not the total number of returned surveys. This is referred to as a valid percent. Also, many of the questions allowed for multiple responses, so the percentages do not add up to 100%.

Question 1: Respondents' primary occupations, businesses, or public roles in southeast Minnesota, response rate 95% (231 out of 242)

Occupation, Business, or Public Role	Frequency	Percent
Local Government	83	35.9%
Farmer	52	22.5%
Business	38	16.5%
Education	29	12.6%
Environmental/land use non-profit or government organization	26	11.3%
Social/economic non-profit or government organization	12	5.2%
Legal	12	5.2%
Publications	10	4.3%
Elected Official	6	2.6%
Technology	1	-----
Tourism	1	-----
Arts	1	-----

Question 2: Length of time respondent has lived in southeast Minnesota, response rate greater than 99% (241 of 242)

Years	Frequency	Percent
More than 20	184	76.3%
11-20	22	9.1%
6-10	13	5.3%
Less than 5	17	7.1%
Do not live in southeast Minnesota	5	2.1%

Question 3: Issues most important to southeast Minnesota's future, average of 3.8 responses per survey, response rate 100% (242 of 242)

Issues	Frequency	Percent
Agriculture	193	79.8%
Rural/Small Town Life	171	70.7%
Economic Development	149	61.6%
Natural resources	133	55.0%
Tourism	103	42.6%
Forestry	65	26.9%
Wildlife	60	24.8%
Other*	37	6.5%

*included affordable housing, health care, "all of the above" (in reference to categories listed), infrastructure, education, community values, access to technology, maintaining diversity, and quality of life issues

Question 4: Assessment of future quality of life in southeast Minnesota, response rate 96% (233 of 242)

Quality of Life	Frequency	Percent
Quality of life will stay about the same	88	37.8%
Quality of life will deteriorate	59	25.3%
Quality of life will improve	54	23.2%
Unsure/don't know	32	13.7%

Question 5 (open ended): Three biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota's future, response rate 97% (234 of 242), see section 3 for a more detailed analysis of these responses

Problems	Frequency	Percent
Economic issues	118	50.4%
Land use, growth, and planning	108	46.2%
Agriculture	91	38.9%
Environment/Natural resources	83	35.4%
Population change	43	18.4%
Infrastructure	37	15.8%
Community values & leadership	36	15.4%

Education	31	13.2%
Other*	16	6.8%
Housing	14	6.0%
Government regulations	12	5.1%
Healthcare	9	3.8%
Loss of small town life	9	3.8%
Taxes	6	2.6%
Tourism	3	1.3%

*included crime, drugs, and diversity issues

Question 6 (open ended): Southeast Minnesota's three most important assets or strengths response rate 95% (230 of 242)

Assets or Strengths	Frequency	Percent
People	102	44.3%
Environment & natural resources	96	41.6%
Natural beauty	96	41.7%
Agriculture	52	22.6%
Community values	44	19.1%
Economic strengths	41	17.8%
Tourism	30	13.0%
Small town & rural life	27	11.7%
Quality of life	26	11.3%
Education	23	10.0%
Infrastructure	22	9.6%
Other*	16	7.0%
Healthcare	9	3.9%
Government Regulations & Leaders	5	2.6%

*included a variety of responses that did not fall into any category

Question 7: Two Contributions Experiment in Rural Cooperation can make to shaping a positive future for southeast Minnesota, response rate 96% (232 of 242)

Contributions by Experiment	Frequency	Percent
Supporting small businesses, food ventures, and other agriculture related initiatives	128	55.2%
Sponsoring alternative projects in agriculture, natural resources, forestry, tourism, etc.	121	52.2%
Supporting research on agriculture and natural resources issues	52	22.4%
Making existing support programs more accessible and integrated	51	22.0%
Undertaking a few really large projects (i.e. economic development strategies)	35	15.1%
Developing new projects or programs	25	10.8%
Other*	23	9.9%

*see Appendix A for a list of these comments

Question 8: Respondents rated the following list of issues on the basis of how important it was for the issue to be addressed in southeast Minnesota in the near future. Frequencies are noted below each valid percent.

	High Importance	Medium Importance	Low Importance	No Importance	Don't Know	Response Rate (of 242)
Weakening agricultural economy	69.5% 164	28.8% 68	0.8% 2	0.4% 1	0.4% 1	98% (236)
Environmental deterioration (water, soil, etc.)	65.6% 158	30.3% 73	4.1% 10	-----	-----	99% (241)
Loss of family farms	59.7% 142	32.8% 78	4.6% 11	2.1% 5	0.8% 2	98% (238)
Loss of main street businesses	57.2% 135	35.6% 84	5.1% 12	0.8% 2	1.3% 3	98% (236)
Land value pressures from outsider demand	45.7% 106	33.6% 78	16.4% 38	2.6% 6	1.7% 4	96% (232)
Departure of young adults from the region	45.1% 107	38.8% 92	12.2% 29	3.0% 7	0.8% 2	98% (237)
Deteriorating economic conditions	42.5% 99	39.1% 91	13.3% 31	3.0% 7	2.1% 5	96% (233)
Decreasing financial independence of farmers	42.2% 100	45.6% 108	7.6% 18	1.3% 3	3.4% 8	98% (237)
Insufficient availability of investment capital	41.0% 96	36.3% 85	16.7% 39	2.6% 6	3.4% 8	97% (234)
Deterioration of rural infrastructure (roads, sewers)	36.1% 86	40.8% 97	16.0% 38	3.4% 8	3.8% 9	98% (238)
Lack of good jobs in the region	34.5% 81	40.0% 94	21.7% 51	1.7% 4	2.1% 5	97% 235
Increasing and/or unfair taxes	32.3% 76	26.8% 63	28.1% 66	9.8% 23	3.0% 7	97% (235)
Loss of sense of community	31.9% 75	39.1% 92	23.4% 55	4.3% 10	1.3% 3	97% (235)
Increasing land use restrictions	31.1% 73	35.7% 84	25.1% 59	6.0% 14	2.1% 5	97% (235)
Needs of aging population going unmet	31.1% 74	42.4% 101	20.2% 48	2.9% 7	3.4% 8	98% (238)
Limited educational opportunities for children	26.2% 62	35.4% 84	28.7% 68	7.6% 18	2.1% 5	98% (237)
Lack of affordable housing	26.1% 62	41.6% 99	21.8% 52	7.1% 17	3.4% 8	98% (238)
Barriers to attracting new business	21.1% 49	40.5% 94	22.4% (52)	6.0% (14)	9.9% (23)	96% (232)
Limited access to health care services	21.1% 50	35.0% 83	32.9% 78	9.3% 22	1.7% 4	98% (237)
Lack of qualified workers	17.0% 40	40.0% 94	31.9% 75	5.5% 13	5.5% 13	97% (235)

Tourism problems/stress on resources	16.2% 38	37.4% 88	31.5% 74	7.7% 18	7.2% 17	97% (235)
Racial and/or ethnic tensions	11.0% 26	32.6% 77	37.3% 88	15.3% 36	3.8% 9	98% (236)
Migrant worker housing	8.5% 20	27.7% 65	36.6% 86	13.2% 31	14.0% 33	97% (235)

Question 9: Asked respondents to list the organizations, associations, government activities or special interest groups they participate in. See Appendix B for a list of these organizations.

Question 10: Asked respondents to indicate which of the organizations listed in question 9 they are most involved in currently.

Question 11: Issues of primary concern to the organization with which the respondent is most involved, average of 4.5 responses per survey, response rate 90% (219 of 242)

Issues	Frequency	Percent
Land use	113	51.6%
Agriculture	98	44.7%
Government	92	42.0%
Public policy	92	42.0%
Environment	89	40.6%
Education	80	36.5%
Community and family	74	33.8%
Natural resources	71	32.4%
Conservation	60	27.4%
Grants	51	23.3%
Information and referral	44	20.1%
Tourism	39	17.8%
Lobbying	34	15.5%
Research	25	11.4%
Religion	17	7.8%

Question 12: Counties in which the respondent's primary organization is active, average of 2.2 responses per survey, response rate 91% (220 of 242)

Counties	Frequency	Percent
Wabasha	76	34.5%
Winona	75	34.1%
Houston	61	27.7%
Fillmore	73	33.2%
Goodhue	63	28.6%
Olmsted	64	29.1%
Mower	32	14.5%
Dodge	33	15.0%

Question 13: Whether organization in which respondent is most involved has sufficient resources to accomplish its purposes, response rate 92% (223 of 242)

Sufficient Resources	Frequency	Percent
Yes	87	39.0%
No	107	48.0%
Unsure	29	13.0%

Question 14: Whether organization in which respondent is most involved has access to information necessary to carry out its purposes, response rate 92% (223 of 242)

Access to Information	Frequency	Percent
Yes	188	84.3%
No	14	6.3%
Unsure	21	9.4%

Question 15: Overall health of the organization in which respondent is most involved, response rate 91% (221 of 242)

Organization Health	Frequency	Percent
Growing vitality	89	40.3%
Shrinking vitality	31	14.0%
About the same over the years	101	45.7%

Question 16: Three most important sources providing information to organization in which the respondent is most involved, response rate 91% (221 of 242)

Information Sources	Frequency	Percent
Meetings	147	66.5%
Government agencies	140	63.3%
Elected officials	66	29.9%
Newspaper or magazines	63	28.5%
Internet or web	39	17.6%
Conferences	38	17.2%
Family, neighbors, friends	37	16.7%
University of Minnesota	34	15.4%
Other local organizations, churches, or civic groups	24	10.9%
Other higher education institutions	15	6.8%
Private companies	14	6.3%
Radio	3	1.4%
Libraries	2	0.9%
Television	1	0.4%

Question 17: Three most important areas with which the respondents' primary organization needs assistance, response rate 87.6% (212 of 242)

Assistance Needed	Frequency	Percent
Funding	130	61.3%
Planning	90	42.5%
Education	67	31.6%
Marketing	50	23.6%
Grant writing	47	22.2%
Resource integration	45	21.2%
Information gathering	42	19.8%
Research	40	18.9%
Advocacy	39	18.4%
Other*	12	6.1%

***See Appendix C for a list of these comments.**

Question 18 (open ended): Ways in which the University of Minnesota can make a significant and practical contribution to shaping a positive future for southeast Minnesota, see Section 3 for a more detailed analysis of these responses, response rate 61.6% (149 of 242)

University Assistance	Frequency	Percent
Regional education programs	78	52.3%
Supporting projects and small businesses	37	24.8%
Research	27	18.1%
Facilitation	24	16.1%
Broader or different approach	21	14.1%
Promoting sustainability	13	8.7%
Supporting small farms and farmers	11	4.5%
Identifying issues and problems	11	7.4%
Job development	10	6.7%

Question 19 (open ended): Instances where the University of Minnesota has been of value, response rate 52.1% (126 of 242)

University Value	Frequency	Percent
Regional education programs	65	51.6%
Supporting projects and small businesses	43	34.1%
Research	30	23.8%
Facilitation	17	13.5%
Respondent's or family member's education	6	4.8%
Promoting sustainability	5	4.0%
Supporting small farms and farmers	4	3.2%
Identifying issues and problems	4	3.2%
Job development	2	1.6%

Question 20: Familiarity with the term sustainable development, response rate 97% (235 of 242)

Sustainable Development	Frequency	Percent
Very familiar	106	45.1%
Somewhat familiar	102	43.4%
Not familiar	27	11.1%

Question 21: Reaction to the term sustainable development, response rate 96% (233 of 242), average of 1 response per survey

Sustainable Development	Frequency	Percent
No reaction	15	6.4%
A good concept	110	47.2%
A good concept but clouded with negative overtones	52	22.3%
A confusing concept	29	12.4%
A concept I support though I am uncomfortable with the term	18	7.7%
A concept I reject	4	1.7%
Other*	9	3.9%

See Appendix D for a list of these responses.

Question 22: Asked respondents to list projects, businesses, individuals, groups, or programs that approach agriculture and natural resource practices creatively and have potential to contribute to a positive for southeast Minnesota. See Appendix E for this list.

Question 23: Whether respondents would be willing to attend a meeting to further discuss the issues raised in the survey, response rate 95% (231 of 242)

Options	Frequency	Percent
Yes	84	36.4%
No	56	24.2%
Maybe	91	39.4%

Experiment in Rural Cooperation's Board of Directors Comparison

The Experiment's board of directors decided that it would be interesting for the members to fill out the asset survey. Their responses are included in the overall data pool, but were also analyzed separately. Generally, the Experiment's board of directors did not answer the survey questions very differently from the rest of the respondents. However, there were a few questions for which this was not the case. Not surprisingly, the board of directors were much more familiar with the concept of sustainable development than were the respondents as a whole, with the vast majority (94%) of the board members describing themselves as "very familiar" with the term (versus 45.1% of the overall pool of respondents). The breakdown of responses to the term sustainable development among the board members was quite similar to that of the overall pool of respondents. A

larger portion of the board members (43% as compared to 25%) thought that the quality of life in southeast Minnesota will deteriorate. The board members did not differ significantly from the overall pool of respondents as far as identifying which issues are most important to the future of southeast Minnesota. There was, however, greater consensus among the board members that environmental deterioration and loss of family farms were issues of high importance. While these comparisons are interesting, it should be noted that it is difficult to compare such a small group of responses with the overall pool. Patterns that seem to emerge from the board responses may in part be due to the small number of board surveys.

Mapping Example

Overall, it was a bit difficult to represent the results of this survey in a mapping format. This was primarily because the only geographic information in the data set has to do with the county(ies) that each respondent's primary organization is active in. However, a map was created as an example of how GIS technology can be used to demonstrate research findings. The map is on the next page. It shows, by county, the difference between each county's overall representation in the sample (based on whether the respondent's primary organization is active in that county, question 12) and the percentage of organizations cited as growing in vitality (question 15) active in each county. For example, 31.4% of the organizations cited were active in Wabasha county. Of all the organizations that were cited as growing in vitality, 41.6% of them were active in Wabasha county. The difference between the county's overall representation in the sample and its representation in the category of organizations growing in vitality was greater than 10%, so it is shaded a dark blue (as are Winona and Olmsted counties).

SECTION THREE

ANALYSIS OF OPEN ENDED RESPONSES

Question 5

What are the three biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota's future?

The following provides more detailed analysis of the responses to the question about what problems are most important to the future of southeast Minnesota.

Economic Issues

50.4% of respondents cited economic issues as being of key importance to the future of southeast Minnesota. The most frequently cited concern was the lack of livable wage jobs in the region. The related issue of the loss of small town businesses was also an area of broad concern. Less frequently cited areas of concern included general statements about the need for economic diversity and stability, the need for development, and the lack of vitality of small towns and rural areas. A smaller number of respondents made the connection between economic difficulties and the fact that many people, especially the young, are leaving the region. The following list summarizes the survey responses about economic issues and indicates the number of times each issue was raised in response to the question about the biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota's future. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Illustrative quotes follow each category in italics.

Lack of livable wage jobs (22)

"Lack of good jobs in rural areas."

Loss of small town businesses (17)

"Loss of small town retail businesses."

Vitality of rural areas and small towns (10)

"Small communities struggling to survive."

"Economically viable rural communities."

Need for economic diversity and stability (9)

"Developing and maintaining a diverse economic base."

Lack of (resources for sufficient) economic development (9)

"Lack of economic development-can't compete with the metro area."

"Availability of capital investment for promising ventures."

Economic problems resulting in the loss of (young) people from the region (5)

"Loss of jobs/resources (young people) to urban areas."

The following quotes were difficult to classify, but provide important insights about perceptions of the economic problems in southeast Minnesota.

“Inflation and high cost of living.”

“Lack of small city and local government funding.”

“Lack of tax base to support services.”

“Unquestioned belief in economies of scale.”

“The gap between those who have and those who don’t is larger with less of a middle strata.”

Land Use, Growth and Planning

46.2% of the respondents cited issues surrounding land use, growth, and planning as being of key importance to the future of southeast Minnesota. The overwhelming area of concern was that growth and development are occurring haphazardly and without a clear vision for the future. Many respondents specifically referenced urban sprawl as a problematic issue. A similar number of respondents cited the impact that development has on farming as an issue of key importance. A somewhat smaller number of respondents discussed the challenge of balancing the need for development with preservation of the environment. The extent to which outside investment is raising land prices and limiting local access to land was also an issue of concern, though the least frequently cited. The following list summarizes the survey responses about land use, growth, and planning and indicates the number of times each issue was raised in response to the question about the biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota’s future. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Illustrative quotes follow each category in italics.

Unplanned growth and development (in need of more careful management) (31)

“Lack of future vision and goals and planning.”

“Continued rapid development...what form will it take?”

“Lack of awareness in decision-makers of unintended consequences of accelerated growth.”

Urban sprawl (20)

“Educating the formally educated about land use, as they are the main culprits in urban sprawl.”

Development impacts on farming (16)

“Loss of rural land to development”

“Land use plans that limit production agriculture”

Balancing the need for development with the need to preserve the environment (12)
“Maintaining a healthy natural environment while developing the region”

“Attracting new businesses without affecting the quality of life (pollution, etc)”

Increasing outside investment and its impact on land prices and local access to land (9)

“Land prices increasing out of the reach of beginning farmers—primarily due to outside investors coming in with big money.”

The following quotes were difficult to classify, but provide important insights about perceptions of land use, growth, and planning in southeast Minnesota.

“Lack of coordination between county, township, and city land use planning and zoning, resulting in negative impact on water resources.”

“People in cities and farms understanding the concept of sustainability.”

Agriculture

38.9% of the respondents cited agriculture as an issue of key importance to the future of southeast Minnesota. The most commonly cited concern was the decreasing number of small and family owned farms. The closely related issue of corporate agriculture’s increasing influence in the region was also a key concern. Respondents also expressed a great deal of concern about the broader impacts of a diminishing farm economy. Though they were cited much less frequently than the three previous issues, respondents also expressed concern about the environmental impacts of a changing agricultural base and the loss of diversified agriculture. The following list summarizes the survey responses about agriculture and indicates the number of times each issue was raised in response to the question about the biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota’s future. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Illustrative quotes follow each category in italics.

Loss of small/family farms and farming as a way of life (38)

“Small farms are dying out”

Decreasing economic viability of farming and the broader economic impacts of this (28)

“(Loss of) economically sound agriculture that supports smaller towns.”

Consolidation of farms, increasing influence of corporate agriculture (25)

“Industrial farms taking over with no connection or concern for the land and community”

Environmental impacts of a changing agriculture base (8)

“Rapid growth of surviving farms to factory farms which causes excess pollution”

Loss of diversified agriculture (7)

“Conversion of agriculture to larger and less complex operations”

Community, Leadership and Vision

15.4% of the respondents cited issues relating to community, leadership, and vision as being of key importance to the future of southeast Minnesota. These comments were generally characterized by a concern that the people of southeast Minnesota are not communicating effectively about important issues, and that leaders are not actively engaged in bringing this process to bear. More specifically, respondents expressed concern that tensions caused by changing population trends are blocking important conversations about the future of the region. Less frequently cited concerns included tensions between city and rural residents, loss of rural/small town life, and resistance to change. The following list summarizes the survey responses about community, leadership, and vision and indicates the number of times each issue was raised in response to the question about the biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota’s future. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Illustrative quotes follow each category in italics.

Lack or loss of sense of community, common vision, and cooperation (12)

“Rural groups not cooperating to influence events.”

“Lack of a common desired outcome for the area.”

“Lack of vision for a sustainable future.”

Inadequate leadership and representation (8)

“Lack of balanced leadership in local government.”

“Sometimes I wonder if the state house realizes that the state exists below I-90. Judging from the credit we get for our accomplishments, you wouldn’t think so.”

Tensions between long-time residents and newcomers (7)

“New vs. old, locals vs. outsiders—which reduces benefits one could receive by an integration of this diversity—turn a handicap into a benefit.”

Tensions between city and rural residents(4)

“Patronizing urban attitudes about rural and small town life.”

Loss of rural/small town life(4)

“Loss of rural, the “golden egg”

Resistance to change (3)

“CAVE people, Citizens Against Virtually Everything”

Environmental Issues

35.4% of respondents cited environmental issues as being of key importance to the future of southeast Minnesota. Most of these comments were broadly stated, i.e. they simply noted preservation of the environment and natural resources as a key concern. Of those respondents that provided more specific definition of environmental problems in southeast Minnesota, water quality was by far the most frequently cited concern. Soil erosion was the second most common concern, followed closely by pollution from agriculture. Other, less frequently cited concerns, included pollution more generally, forest management and protection, increasing energy use, and loss of habitat/species. The following list summarizes the survey responses about environmental issues and indicates the number of times each issue was raised in response to the question about the biggest problems facing southeast Minnesota's future. They are listed in order of descending frequency.

Water quality (ground and surface)(22)

Soil erosion (10)

Pollution from agriculture (7)

Pollution generally and from industry (5)

Forest management/protection (3)

Increasing energy use (3)

Loss of habitat/species (2)

Question 18

How do you think that the University of Minnesota can make a significant and practical contribution to shaping a positive future for southeast Minnesota?

This question had a low response rate; only 61.6% of survey respondents answered this question. This was an open ended question placed at the end of the survey, which may be part of the reason for the low response rate. Despite the low response, the answers were extremely rich and varied. The complexity of the material gained from this question made it difficult to classify. The following attempts to summarize the information into categories. However, much of the material has been left in its original form, so as to not compromise the nuance of the responses.

Regional Education

The largest number of comments regarding the role that the University could or should play in shaping the future of southeast Minnesota (51.6%) centered around regional

education. Many respondents cited Extension services as valuable to community development and education. A similar number encouraged the expansion or continuation of educational programs having to do with land use and the environment. A slightly smaller group of respondents expressed concern about cuts to Extension funding and that organization's ability to serve communities' educational needs. The following list summarizes the survey responses about the University's role in regional education and indicates the number of times each issue was raised. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Some respondents provided specific ideas for educational programs; these comments are at the end of this section.

Extension-continue good work (15)

"Continue outreach activities in greater Minnesota-Extension and related endeavors."

"Continue funding Minnesota Extension Service, a priceless resource for everyone."

Education programs related to land use and the environment (10)

"By educating people that land is something sacred, a gift to use, share and preserve for future generations."

"More involvement in environmental and natural resource education and a better outreach program related to these issues."

Extension-budget cuts, need for improvement (7)

"Extension in the past was essential, unfortunately it isn't the hub of information any longer."

"Through Extension, which they have cut the funding."

Seminars and education services generally (5)

"Provide resource people and programming to southeast Minnesota."

Education programs related to economic development (4)

"Contributing research and practical advice to alternative producers, and to businesses trying to better use local ag products."

Education opportunities/seminars should be held in enough places that they exist within reasonable driving distance of all residents (2)

The following comments had to do with the development of specific educational projects:

"General public has poor understanding of Minnesota government and its revenue gathering"

"Computer training to general public"

“Provide educational opportunities to retrain and reeducate workers via the Internet.”

“Work with small rural schools to offer interactive classes through web and classrooms. Would like to see both day and evening classes offered.”

Project Support

34.1% of the respondents cited the support of projects and small businesses as a key role for the University to play in shaping the future of southeast Minnesota. The more specific comments fell generally into two categories: support projects related to economic development and support projects that assist farmers, especially young farmers. The number of responses that fell into each category, along with illustrative quotes, are listed below.

Support projects that assist farmers, especially young farmers (6)

“Stabilize the family farm and make it affordable for youth to start operating.”

“Help with farmland transition to the next generation.”

Support projects related to economic development (5)

“Their ability to help research and lead projects for either economic growth within tourism or small business growth.”

“By forming a regional/statewide taskforce that would assist in finding a solution to the loss of small business in rural communities or how to combat this issue.”

The following suggestions did not fit neatly into either category:

“Purchase land for public use”

“Encourage investment in alternative energy”

Research

23.8% of the respondents cited research as an important way for the University to shape the future of southeast Minnesota. Many of these comments were quite general and expressed appreciation for past research and/or encouraged more of it for the future. The following comments make more specific recommendations or observations regarding the University’s research work.

“Create a door to the University for multi-disciplinary research projects. A good example is the need to fully study groundwater pollution removal in ag settings.”

“Developing alternative fuel sources.”

University of Minnesota should take a different approach

14.1% of the comments fell into the general category of “the University needs to take a different approach.” The majority of these comments had to do with making University services more accessible and grassroots oriented. A slightly smaller number of the responses related specifically to broadening the University’s approach to agriculture to engage and support smaller, non-corporate farmers. The following list summarizes the survey responses about the University of Minnesota taking a different approach and indicates the number of times each issue was raised. They are listed in order of descending frequency. Illustrative quotes follow each category in italics.

Be more involved at local, grassroots level and be more accessible (9)

“Getting involved directly, getting out in the field, learning what’s going on and what’s needed”

“More accessible, local consultation and assistance”

Expand agricultural services to include smaller, non-corporate approaches. (5)

“Change in mindset from supporting large agribusiness to assisting sustainable farming and small, rural business”

“Quit trying to get every farmer to get bigger and make them land poor like out west. Learn ways to start out young farmers.”

The following quotes were difficult to classify, but provide valuable insights about what sorts of alternative approaches the University might take when working with communities.

“They need to think sustainability—long term not short term survival and immediate profit. They have to recognize the need for major policy changes. Too often U of M people seem to seek out a situation or producer who is successful by their definition and then try to duplicate this. They need to recognize the uniqueness of each individual and situation...”

“Be open minded, the U of M way is not the only way...”

*“Shift again from self preservation (preserving positions) to genuinely serving again-growth occurs through service not manufactured need...
Provide not only planning services but, as projects change over time, politicians change, new staff—be able to follow up over the long term to keep on track.”*

University providing facilitation services, consensus building, and planning assistance

13.5% of the comments dealt with the potential for the University to expand its role in facilitating action and discussion around issues of common concern in southeast

Minnesota. The majority of these comments dealt with broad notions of facilitation and cooperation among various groups. A smaller number of respondents recommended that the University continue or expand its technical role as a facilitator.

Work to coordinate organizations and people to act on common goals (13)

“By performing the role of synthesizer helping to coordinate activities of the public and private sector”

“Provide continuity, coordination between different levels of government.”

“Everyone seems to be doing “own thing”, working together as a team would be much more effective in achieving common goals.”

Provide facilitation services (5)

Participate in planning and development discussions (3)

“Can the U of M think of a way to enhance the incorporation of local values and environmental concerns into the development process?...Choosing the character of growth, or rather, influencing it, means placing incentives and regulations quickly and developing a public sense of responsibility above current levels.”